

Hodgkin's clusters linked to affluence

By Robin Lloyd
STAFF WRITER

LA CANADA FLINTRIDGE — Cases of Hodgkin's disease such as those suffered by former students at a school in the Arroyo Seco are more often related to affluence than exposure to toxic chemicals, a USC researcher said.

Wendy Cozen, medical epidemiologist for the USC Cancer Surveillance Program, declined to com-

ment directly on the local issue of whether Jet Propulsion Laboratory's dumping of toxic chemicals decades ago contributed to Hodgkin's cases among former students of St. Bede Catholic School nearby.

But she said research shows that clusters of the most common type of Hodgkin's disease — nodular sclerosis — are usually associated with affluent demographics, not

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toxics. "For young adults, there is no evidence that high exposure to chemicals has anything to do with the etiology of the disease," Cozen said.

The most common demographic profile is white, age 15-35, from higher educational and economic backgrounds, Cozen said.

The susceptibility to Hodgkin's is related to affluence because children in high-income families tend to have fewer siblings and less exposure to other kids, Cozen said.

"The model is a patient who is raised in an environment that is protected and not exposed to lots of little kids, a person of high social class who didn't get all the childhood dis-

eases when they were supposed to," she said. "They (get) exposed to kids at a later age and get the disease as an adolescent or young adult."

In the local case, a lawsuit has been filed by a Glendale woman who claims her daughter's fatal Hodgkin's disease was caused by JPL's dumping of toxic chemicals.

JPL officials have in the past conceded the dumping but vowed to fight the lawsuit vigorously, questioning the link between Hodgkin's disease and chemicals.

Attorney Tom Girardi is representing Anita Salvo, who claims her daughter Francesca's 1989 death was the result of the NASA lab's dumping of 23 toxic chemicals in the Arroyo Seco decades ago. Two Sunland women with Hodgkin's are co-plaintiffs on the lawsuit, seeking unspecified damages.

The three women in the lawsuit attended St. Bede Catholic School — within a mile of JPL — in the 1970s, were diagnosed

as young adults and lived in the La Canada Flintridge area, where residents tend to be well-educated and affluent.

But Girardi dismissed Cozen's analysis, saying research will uphold his clients' claims.

"Research in these areas is pretty useless unless you're dealing right at the cutting edge because the causative factors of chemicals and disease growing at a geometric progression rate," he said.

Girardi says five more people diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease who attended St. Bede have approached him in the past week to learn more about the lawsuit. ★

"I think jurors would be very impressed that this wasn't just some solitary case that took place, but something that is widespread," Girardi said.

Legal staffers will interview the five people this week, and evaluate whether to add them to the lawsuit, the lawyer said.

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